

~~SECRET~~THE SHIFTING IMAGE OF THE EAST-WEST BALANCE OF POWER

SUMMARY

A factor of potentially great significance in the East-West power conflict is the gradually shifting image of who is the world's strongest power, the US or USSR. Many important people now view the world balance of power as having shifted in favor of the USSR; they no longer see the US as dominant. Evidence of this shift appears in all quarters--among the swaying neutrals, in once sympathetic niches behind the Iron Curtain, and among our closest allies. This evidence occurs not only in public opinion surveys but in a sifting of official State Department, CIA, and other reporting, which provides more direct insight into elite views specifically. A shift in the world's image of the two major powers is well underway.

Causes of the change lie deeper than the much vaunted Soviet space successes. Although the sputniks have enhanced the prestige of the Soviet military, they have also turned a spotlight on the progress and "efficiency" of the Soviet economic system. Increased respect for the total Soviet achievement, doubts about the ability of a free economic system to compete successfully with a directed one, and skepticism about the efficiency and determination of US leadership have stimulated reappraisal of US pre-eminence.

This development, however intangible can have great cumulative impact. Whether the power balance actually shifts or not, the world's image of it may do as much to create an imbalance as the

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elements of power themselves.

DISCUSSION

Evidence of a shift in thinking about the relative power of the US and USSR is widespread among neutrals, behind the Iron Curtain, and among our closest allies. During talks in Saigon in August 1959, for instance, Cambodian Premier Sihanouk is reliably reported to have justified his nation's neutrality as the only "safe" policy in view of the inevitability of a Soviet victory in any war, conventional or atomic.¹ Visitors returning from the Leipzig industrial fair in February 1960 carried back impressions of a "subsurface change that has been caused by the shift in the world balance of power since the first Soviet Sputnik." In the words of one reporter, "The idea seems to be gaining ground among the East Germans that the Soviet Union rather than the West may represent the wave of the future."² Public opinion surveys in the United Kingdom and France reveal not only the view, predominant over the past two years, that the USSR is now stronger than the US but the more significant notion that, if the US and the USSR "settle down to twenty years of competitive coexistence, the USSR will end up the stronger power."³

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There is a growing conviction that the shift in the East-West balance of military power to the Soviet Bloc is an actual

fact, not merely a claim of Soviet propaganda."⁴

How did this shift come about? Although it is common to date the change from the early sputnik successes, its causes go deeper. Soviet space achievements have only provided a catalyst. The time was ripe for such a shift, and the drama of the sputniks did the plucking. Three simple mental steps have taken many thinkers from sputnik to a new view of the balance of power: (1) The sputniks have called attention to the effectiveness of Soviet rocketry and, as exploited by the Soviets have indirectly enhanced their prestige to a point where many believe that the USSR is now militarily superior to the US; (2) the dramatic achievements of Soviet science and technology have also called attention to the progress and efficiency of the Soviet economic system and have cast doubt on the ability of a free economic system to compete successfully with a directed one; (3) increased respect for the total Soviet achievement has caused reappraisal of the US claim to superiority and aroused skepticism about the efficiency of American leadership and the determination of the American government and people to maintain their once pre-eminent position.

Although sophisticated observers recognize the distinction between sputniks in space and military power, Soviet success in space has enhanced Soviet military prestige. From [] teachers 50X1-HUM who manifested [] their concern that Soviet space 50X1 successes presaged military superiority⁵ to the [] who 50X1-HUM "feel that the successful launching of the Soviet LUNIK demonstrates

very clearly the military supremacy of the Soviets over the United States"⁶ educated man and tribesman could agree

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that "American

policy is facing a period characterized by...the realization that over a certain number of years superiority in the atomic and missile field has shifted from Washington to Moscow."⁷

Even more important than highlighting increased Soviet military power, the sputniks have opened eyes to the progress and supposed efficiency of the entire Soviet economic system and have cocked heads to evidence that such a system is more capable than a free one of coming out on top. Embassy officials in Bern, for instance, observed that after the launching of the first Soviet satellite, the Swiss revealed "intense interest and speculation as to whether the US is losing the armaments race and whether a free society can compete effectively in a limited field such as missile production with a totalitarian state."⁸ Behind the exciting haze of space ventures we often lose sight of the fact that basic economic changes taking place in the Soviet Union are having an even more profound affect than spectacular rocketry on minds all over the world. After the recent visit of Austrian leaders to the USSR, the US embassy in Vienna observed, "Partly through such first-hand demonstration of their achievements, and partly through other efforts and propaganda activities which emphasize their economic and technical advancement, the Soviets may have influenced Austrian leaders toward estimating

that a shift in the balance of power between East and West, in favor of the USSR and its allies, has actually occurred in the last few years."⁹ African visitors have been equally impressed: "Haile Selassie was thoroughly impressed by the Soviet Union and he now feels he had been previously misled. Members of the Emperor's entourage on the trip were unanimous in expressing amazement at the high level of technical progress and freedom observed in the Soviet Union.

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Soviet

successes in space have thrown a spotlight on the more basic economic progress which some West Europeans believe will enable the USSR to top the US in two decades of competitive coexistence.

The reappraisal of American pre-eminence stimulated by rapid Soviet progress has taken two tacks: first, a loss of confidence in the efficiency of US leadership, and second, a questioning of US determination to hold the line against Soviet expansion. Many, like the Dutch press, attributed the "phenomenal Soviet lead in the scientific field to the lack of capable leadership in the US in recent years."¹¹ Others simply echoed American critics who feared that lagging missile development was tantamount to a second rate military posture. West Germany's most noted military expert, for instance, wrote in the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung that, because of budget demands and inter-service struggles, the US had probably never been so inadequately armed as now and questioned whether the US even has the military strength to deal

with brush-fire wars.¹²

Once aroused to the possible inefficiency of American leadership, many observers have moved on to question the determination of the US to stand firm against Soviet pressure. Nowhere is this more obvious than in West Germany, where the Berlin question occupies center stage. US consular political officers, for instance, noted in October 1959, a widespread sense of anxiety throughout West Germany that the power balance between East and West had shifted and that the West, bargaining from a deteriorating position, no longer held the tactical initiative. In January 1960, they reported that this preoccupation with a shift of power had turned into doubt about the determination of the West, and particularly the US to commit its power to hold the present line in Germany.¹³

In other quarters, the late detente was interpreted as American concession of the shift in the balance of power. "Millions of Italians," said an Italian politician, "have interpreted the detente as a proof of Soviet superiority in the field of scientific discovery and armaments, as a renunciation by the Americans, either from impotence or fear, of the defense of the Free World. And they are preparing to go to the other side, to back the winning horse, and to get into the good graces of the Communists whom they already see in power with in a short time."¹⁴ Perhaps the most telling comment of all is the predominant conclusion of citizens polled in Great Britain, France, West Germany and Italy in March 1960, that the Soviet people have greater faith in their basic principles and

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are willing to work harder to push their country into the lead in national achievement.

Two major consequences of the shifting image of the balance of power are apparent: (1) close allies of the US are already planning for a future without the US, and (2) some non-aligned nations are ready to throw in their lot with what they now consider the winning side. The thinking of some of our allies is most clearly revealed in a comment by DeGaulle in December 1959; "The United States is tending to fall back more and more on peripheral strategy and therefore Europe must gradually play a greater role in European defense. An Anglo-American withdrawal from Europe, if not imminent, must come and the Europeans must plan accordingly."¹⁵ Such thinking calls up the image of a new Western European Bloc with the US excluded in all fields from trade to defense.

The thinking of the neutral nations is characteristically expressed in the "safe" policy of Premier Sihanouk

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[redacted] that his people are hastening to back the "winning horse". It is here that the shifting image of US power may carry more influence than an accurate appraisal of military and economic power; it is here that Soviet propaganda is most effective; and it is there the successes of the Soviet economy will be most felt.

Whether or not the actual balance of power will shift in favor of the USSR by 1970, many important groups believe that it is already shifting. Their belief - or misbelief - may be more important than military or economic might in affecting the alignment of nations in

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1970. Much is said about the danger of war by miscalculation; the fact of a shifting image of the balance of power adds a new dimension to the nature of that miscalculation. Whereas strategists now fear miscalculation of power and intent by one of the major powers, they might well be concerned over the consequences of miscalculation of the balance of power by the potential allies of future belligerents. And in a cold war context, elite views as to who has the handle of history can have even greater impact on alliances and alignments vis-a-vis East or West.

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